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BULLETIN OF THE CITY ART MUSEUM OF ST. LOUIS

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STAINED GLASS PANEL

FRENCH, XIII CENTURY

Bulletin of the City Art Museum of St. Louis

STAINED GLASS

THE City Art Museum has recently acquired a notable example of mediæval stained glass¹ of the thirteenth century, from France. The specimen secured is a large upright panel, 2 feet 9 inches by 6 feet 6 inches, and is probably from the clearstory of an early cathedral. The subject is a seated personage, possibly one of the prophets, as indicated by the scroll which he holds in the left hand. The only clue to his identity is contained in the three widely spaced letters, M...L...E..., on a horizontal band at the level of the shoulder. The letters may be an abbreviation of the name of the prophet Malachi (sometimes spelled Malachæ), or they may stand for Melchizedek, king of Salem and "a priest greater than Aaron." (Hebrews 7.) The large scale upon which the composition is drawn would indicate that it was originally placed far from the ground, possibly in a clearstory or triforium window, though rather narrow for the latter use. On the other hand, one would expect a clearstory window of the period to have an arched top. This objection may be met by assuming that the Museum's example is the lower panel of a double window. In the thirteenth century, church windows began to be divided into comparatively long, narrow lights, grouped beneath a rose light. To fill the long narrow spaces the use of one panel above another was frequent.

In point of drawing, the figure is an example of the Gothic style at its beginning. Though having a certain degree of freedom of gesture, there is an archaic stiffness in the pose which shows lingering traces of Byzantine

influence, the treatment recalling the figures upon early Byzantine mosaics and enamels. This archaic naivete imparts an air of dignity and mystery to the panel which is not the least of the charms of mediæval stained glass. The seated position of the figure, the use of a throne, the peculiar treatment of the drapery and the brilliant coloring, are characteristic of the school of Champagne in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; and it may be reasonably assumed that the Museum's panel was made in northern France by a member of this school, the center of which was at Reims. The glass of the cathedrals of Châlons-sur-Marne, of Bourges, and of Reims, are by the school of Champagne and present many analogies to the Museum's piece, as does also a late twelfth century panel of French glass belonging to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.¹

A thin, slightly pointed arch, with its supporting columns, frames the figure upon the example in the St. Louis Museum. In the simple arch and slender columns we have a precursor of the elaborate architectural canopies which ran riot in the stained glass windows of the fourteenth century. It is here quite unobtrusive, being little more than a mere frame for the figure. The panel in the Metropolitan Museum, which was probably made only a few years earlier, does not possess this architectural framing, which in the form here seen may be regarded as a distinguishing mark of thirteenth century work.

The distinctive characteristics of the Museum's panel and the qualities which set it apart from the stained and painted glass of subsequent periods, are its rich luminous color and its jewel-like brilliance, which make

¹ The term "stained glass" is colloquially used for all sorts of colored window glass, whether painted with enamel colors, colored through while in the melting pot, or "flushed," that is, made up of thin layers of different colors fused together.

¹ Described and illustrated in an article by A. Kinsley Porter in *Art in America*, December, 1918.



STAINED GLASS PANEL

NUREMBERG, XV CENTURY

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the more pretentiously decorated glass of later centuries seem quite dull and lifeless in comparison. This decorative brilliance is due to a number of causes, the most important of which perhaps are, the mosaic-like construction of the design from many relatively small pieces of glass of different colors; the use of richly variegated "pot metal" glass, that is, glass colored through in the making; and the absence of extensive overpainting in dull enamel colors.

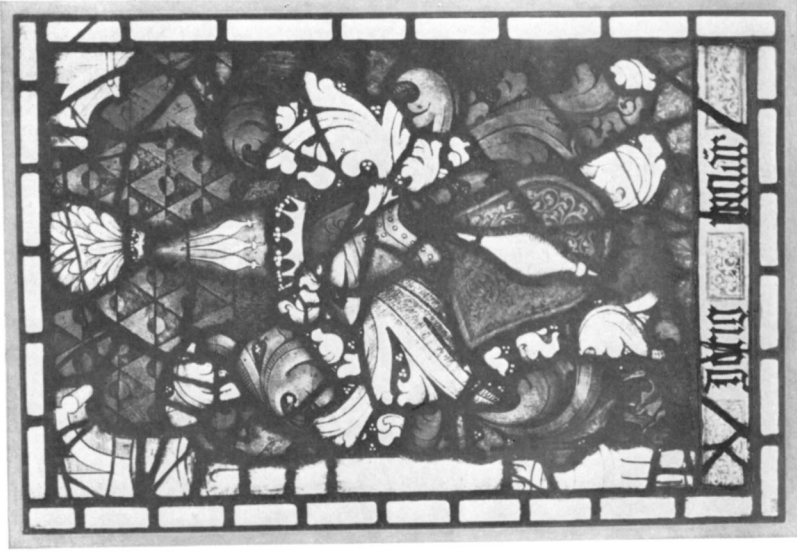
The stained glass workers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were essentially designers; their only thought was to fill the windows of the imposing mediæval cathedrals with decorative panels, which in the semi-gloom of the great aisles would gleam with the radiance of jewels. There was no attempt to imitate the work of painters in the production of the illusion of modelling. The glass was put together, as in the present example, like a mosaic design, each detail was formed of an individual piece of colored glass; the lead lines followed and accentuated the lines of the design; and a black enamel paint was used, in lines only, at points where the introduction of lead was impractical, as for instance in rendering small details like the eyes. There is complete freedom from the use of enamel paints for the purpose of getting modelling and color. The panel is, in fact, an example of skilled craftsmanship in stained glass and not an effort to produce a transparent painting in an unsympathetic medium. The result is far more decorative in effect and infinitely more brilliant in color than the thickly painted work of later centuries, because the enamel paint of necessity has a certain amount of opacity to produce the illusion of light and shade and this is highly inimical to the chief attraction of stained glass—its luminosity.

The predominating colors in the panel acquired by the Museum are a rich red and blue, "pot metal" colors characteristic of the best twelfth and thirteenth century work. These colors are not even and flat, but are streaked in various tones, which imparts to them a sparkling, jewel-like quality. We read, indeed, that it was the aim of the glaziers to give their glass the richness of jewels, and their colors were often named for precious stones, a survival of which to the present time may be found in the term ruby glass. The other important colors in the Museum's piece are a deep purple and a light green in the drapery, the latter serving to supply the high lights of the composition. A brownish pink is used for the flesh tints and there are small touches of yellow and dark green at various points.

Three other panels of stained glass which have been acquired by the Museum¹ are typical examples of the development of the craft at the end of the fifteenth century. They are of German workmanship, from Nuremberg, and were formerly in the Rodolphe Kann Collection, Paris. Though of slightly different periods, they have been mounted together as a triptych. The central panel,² which is said to date from the end of the fifteenth century, bears a full length figure of St. Maurice, who according to more or less legendary accounts, became a martyr in the third century because of his refusal to join in the persecution of the Christians which took place during the reign of Maximian and Diocletian. The saint is shown clothed in Maximilian armor, holding a standard in the left hand and with the same hand resting on a shield, *party per pale, azure and argent*. The contours of the armor

¹ Purchased November, 1920.

² Size 32 inches by 14½ inches.



ARMS OF YORIG VISLAR

STAINED GLASS PANELS. NUREMBERG.



ARMS OF OTTO RUESSTORFFER

STAINED GLASS PANELS. NUREMBERG.

Bulletin of the City Art Museum of St. Louis

are delicately shaded with opaque brownish toned enamel, and the face is carefully modelled. The background is painted to represent drapery having the familiar pomegranate pattern of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in green on a black ground. In technique this panel is separated by a wide gap from the thirteenth century piece just discussed. It has certainly gained in refinement of tone and line, but at the price of losing the jewel-like splendor of the older work. The lead lines still follow in the main the chief lines of the design, but there is a mass of intricate detail which the maker was forced to put in with paint. Silver stain¹ has been used for the trimmings of the armor, for the hair and for the halo and the standard. The other colors used,—blue in the shield, green in the background and orange red in the floor,—are dull and lusterless, but in keeping with the pictorial quality of the glass as a whole.

The other two panels² have each a coat of arms with the accompanying ornament of mantling, helm and crest, the decorative possibilities of which have been fully utilized. The arrangement of these details follows in a general way the style of the coats of arms designed by Dürer and his school. The escutcheon on the panel at the left, which might be blazoned *argent a demi-wolf rampant, gules*, is that of Otto Ruesstorffer, whose name in Gothic black letters appears at the bottom of the glass. The crest is a demi-wolf like that upon the escutcheon. Both the escutcheon and crest are made from "flashed" glass, in this instance consisting of a thin layer of red over clear glass. The design is

¹ It was discovered in the early years of the 14th century that if white glass is coated with chloride or oxide of silver and then fired, a durable and brilliant yellow color would be produced.

² Size of each, 28¹/₄ inches by 18¹/₂ inches.

made by etching or grinding away the red to expose the white glass beneath. The scrolls forming the mantling terminate in foliage forms probably derived from oak leaves. The mantling is cut into irregular squares by the leading, without much regard to its outlines, the aim apparently being to secure the requisite contrast of light and dark. The red and white portions of the mantling represent respectively its upper and lower surfaces, and the numerous scrolls into which it is subdivided are symbolical of the slashings which it has received in many a hard fought battle. The right hand panel is quite similar to the one described. It bears the arms of Yorig Vislar, whose name is likewise inscribed upon it in black letters. The device with which the shield is charged resembles a distaff. The crest consists of a *panache* or plume of feathers, above a cone-shaped arrangement of red "flashed" glass bearing the charge from the escutcheon, three times repeated, resting upon one crest-coronet and surmounted by another. At the left of the panel is a painted column. The scrolls of the mantling terminate in acanthus forms, red being used here also to denote the outside of the conventionalized robe. The background of both panels is formed of dull gray blue glass decorated with a painted geometric pattern of countercharged lozenges and circles, or with scrolls formed by painting the entire surface black and scratching out the design. The helmets are in gray blue. The red of the shields and mantling is of brilliant color, but thin and without the charming variety of tone noticed in the thirteenth century panel. The maker has not, however, lost sight of the decorative function of his work and has produced a line and color design of no small interest.